

# Operation Magic Carpet: How Alaska Airlines Rescued 50,000 Yemenite Jews

ALASKA IS RICH IN HISTORY, especially when it comes to aviation. From the first flights of Noel Wien and the bush pilot pioneers to World War II to current time, Alaska continues its global reach and influence.

Just recently, another amazing chapter in Alaska's aviation history was uncovered. In 1949, Alaska Airlines helped transport Jewish citizens from Yemen to Israel as part of a program known as Operation Magic Carpet. It is estimated that at the end of WW II, slightly over 49,000 Jews lived in Yemen, where in pre-Islamic times circa 1300 years ago, there had been a Jewish kingdom: the Himyarite kingdom. Their plight was desperate and all conventional means of relocating them to Israel were cutoff. Alaska Airlines came to their aid, setting up a base of operation in Asmara, Eritrea that included ground crews, pilots and DC-4 and C-46 aircraft.

As part of the airlift and relief effort, Alaska Airline crews flew from Asmara to Aden each morning to pick up their passengers and refuel. Aircraft were reconfigured with benches instead of seats enabling them to transport 120 passengers instead of 50. Extra fuel tanks were also installed down the length of the fuselages. In all, the round trip flight took approximately 20 hours.

*Defying enormous odds  
& extreme danger,  
Brave Alaska Airlines  
pilots airlifted 48,818  
refugees to Israel.*

The route took the refugees along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba to Tel Aviv where they were unloaded. From there, the pilots flew the aircraft to Cyprus to safely spend the night. The next morning, they returned to their home base in Asmara to pick up their next load of appreciative passengers.

These were not just a routine passenger flights. Pilots were typically flying 16-hour days. The desert sand was hard on the aircraft and engines. Fuel was in short supply and navigation was pretty much non-existent, requiring pilots to fly by dead reckoning. Aircraft were also shot at risking the lives of all on board. Approximately 380 flights, carrying 48,818 refugees, successfully relocated nearly all of Yemen's Jewish population to Israel by September 1950. Miraculously not one death or injury occurred among the pilots, passengers, or crews.



Photos courtesy of Alaska Airlines

The program was kept secret for security reasons and to prevent the risk of sabotage. Word of this incredible and note-worthy effort was not made public for quite some time. To Alaska Airlines and all involved in this humanitarian relief effort, well done! ★

For more information on Operation Magic Carpet and the role of Alaska Airlines and others in this inspiring rescue mission, be sure to visit the Alaska Jewish Museum at :

[www.alaskajewishmuseum.com](http://www.alaskajewishmuseum.com)



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